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SENSITIVE

FOR GENERAL (RET) BARRY MCCAFFREY FROM AMBASSADOR WILLIAM
[W.R. BROWNFIELD](#)

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [PTER](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: SCENE SETTER FOR THE VISIT OF GENERAL MCCAFFREY

Summary

[1](#)1. (SBU) President Uribe's "democratic security" policy has hit the FARC and ELN hard over the past five years, with security improving across the country. Colombians are free to travel highways and confidence has skyrocketed, translating into record economic growth. The paramilitary peace process demobilized over 32,000 fighters, reducing human rights violations and creating new space for leftist political parties and civil society. The GOC is seeking U.S. Congressional support for the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement (CTPA) which President Uribe considers key to spur economic growth, attract international investors, and boost revenues to fund social programs and win the fight against narco-terrorism. The U.S. Congress' reluctance to approve the CTPA due to perceived human rights problems -- after Colombia's years as an unflinching U.S. ally -- has bewildered many Colombians, including Uribe.

[1](#)2. (SBU) In January, the GOC presented a Plan Colombia consolidation strategy that puts increased emphasis on socio-economic development and territorial control. Linking military and civilian efforts to consolidate GOC presence in conflictive zones remains a challenge, and comes in an environment of shrinking U.S. assistance. The release of the three U.S. contractors captured by the FARC in February 2003, the longest held U.S. hostages in the world, remains a top priority. President Uribe recently accepted Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez's offer to act as an intermediary for a possible "humanitarian exchange" of FARC-held hostages for FARC prisoners in GOC jails. End Summary.

Security Outlook

[1](#)3. (SBU) President Uribe's "democratic security" policy has seriously weakened the FARC and ELN over the past five years, while the paramilitary peace process demobilized 32,000 fighters. The Colombian security forces experienced a 24 percent increase in manpower--rising from 295,000 to 390,000--and GOC efforts to boost training and equipment translated into improved performance. Kidnappings have fallen from 2800 in 2002 to 687 in 2006, and murders fell from 29,000 to 17,000 during the same period. For the first time in decades, citizens can freely travel the highways. USG security assistance has also been critical in improving logistics, mobility, planning, and intelligence capabilities. Uribe's consistent 70 plus percent approval ratings a year into his second term (which ends in 2010) reflect his successful security policy.

14. (SBU) The FARC has failed in its efforts to mount a major attack against Bogota and its environs since November 2003, and increasingly operates in ever more remote areas. The military now operates in the historic heartland of the FARC, as well as in the main coca growing regions, and has killed several major mid-level FARC commanders in recent months. The GOC scored its most significant strike on the FARC leadership in years, killing FARC 16th Front commander Tomas Medina Cracas, aka "Negro Acacio" on September 1. Still, landmines, disease, logistic issues, limited airlift, distance, and difficult terrain hamper security operations. Moreover, the FARC continues to attack isolated or smaller military and civilian targets.

15. (SBU) The GOC recognizes the need for an integrated military-civilian program to consolidate recent security gains and establish lasting control over former conflict zones. In 2005, it created the Center for Coordinated Integral Action (CCAI), to link the delivery of social services (health care, education, legal, etc.) and the establishment of a civilian presence to military efforts. Setting up civilian institutions in recently-secured areas present important resource and logistical challenges, but are be key to whether the GOC can win over local residents of historically abandoned areas.

Colombian Congress and Local Elections

16. (U) The Colombian Congress passed the President's top legislative priorities last year, including the critical Colombia Trade Promotion Act (CTPA), and a vital bill reforming federal and state revenue sharing. Legislators have now focused on the October 28 local and departmental elections, making significant legislative advances before then unlikely. Public approval of Congress fell as a result of the paramilitary political scandal that erupted in May, and fifteen legislators have been jailed for alleged links to the groups. Fifteen more remain under investigation for alleged paramilitary ties.

17. (U) The GOC has mounted a substantial effort to prevent the FARC, ELN and local criminal groups from influencing the results of the October elections, but many human rights groups remain concerned. The GOC has also invited a large Organization of American States (OAS) electoral observation mission to observe the electoral process, and we are supporting a large domestic observation operation as well. The FARC and other groups have killed 54 candidates to date, but the elections are generally expected to be free and fair.

Fighting Narcotrafficking

18. (SBU) The GOC has invested its substantial resources in the fight against narcotrafficking. Eradication of coca and poppy fields reached record levels in 2006. The GOC has increased its manual eradication program, but understands it cannot replace aerial spraying. Security forces seized a near-record 203 metric tons of cocaine and coca base in 2006, and destroyed a record 200 cocaine laboratories. We continue to work with the GOC to determine how to transfer key tasks as we anticipate that assistance from the U.S. will decline substantially in the future. The GOC has approved over 500 extraditions to the United States, including 109 cases so far in 2007.

Plan Colombia Next Steps

19. (SBU) In January, the GOC presented a Plan Colombia consolidation strategy. The proposal contains a heightened emphasis on social development, assigning new resources to consolidate governance, promote human rights, and to help

displaced people, Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities. It also aims to further reintegrate 42,000 demobilized ex-combatants and deserters.

¶10. (U) USAID receives approximately \$130 million a year which funds programs in four key strategic areas: alternative development and economic policy reform; justice reform, human rights and governance; demobilization and reintegration of illegal armed groups and assistance to internally displaced persons. Alternative development receives approximately \$70 million a year, with spending on internally displaced persons accounting for an additional \$30 million. Colombia has between 2 and 3 million displaced persons, including Afro-Colombians and other vulnerable populations.

Positive Economic Outlook

¶11. (U) Improved security has helped to boost the Colombian economy. 2006 GDP growth was 6.8 percent, while growth in the first half of 2007 has averaged 7.5 percent. The United States remains Colombia's largest trade partner (approximately 40 percent of exports and 28 percent of imports). Colombian exports to the U.S. have grown USD 1 billion per year since the renewal and expansion of the Andean Trade Preferences Act (ATPA), a unilateral trade preference program, in late 2002. U.S. exports to Colombia increased approximately USD 2 billion during that period.

¶12. (SBU) The CTPA remains the GOC's highest economic priority. The Colombian Congress approved the CTPA in June and has since begun deliberations on the modification protocol. Uribe and Colombians are increasingly bewildered that the U.S. Congress has not considered or passed the CTPA in light of what they see as Colombia's unflinching friendship over the past five years. Some (including Vice President Francisco Santos) have mentioned to the media that Colombia may have to review its relations with the United States if the CTPA does not pass. The U.S. Congress has extended trade preferences for Colombian exporters under the ATPA through February 2008.

Labor

¶13. (U) Trade unionists continue to fall victim to violence, but the number killed fell by over 60 percent from 2001-2006. This drop reflects the GOC's overall success in reducing violence (homicides fell by over 40 percent during the same period), as well as increased funding for special protection programs for unionists, human rights activists, journalists, and other threatened groups. The GOC also created a special unit to investigate and prosecute cases of labor violence, the sub-unit has successfully prosecuted 20 "priority" cases to date. Still, human rights groups seek to condition U.S. congressional approval of the CTPA on further GOC progress in prosecuting cases of violence against unionists.

Military Justice and Improved Human Rights Record

¶14. (SBU) The GOC continues to make slow progress on human rights cases involving military abuse or collaboration with paramilitaries. Minister of Defense Santos has identified military justice reform as a top priority; in October, he named the first civilian -- and the first woman -- as Director of the Military Criminal Justice System. Human rights training is mandatory for all members of the military and police. In June 2007, the GOC set up a senior-level commission to develop policies to reduce extrajudicial killings and to support ongoing investigation of alleged killings. In its annual 2006 report, the UN High Commission on Human Rights voiced concern that allegations of extrajudicial killings by Colombian security forces rose from 145 in 2005 to 178 in 2006.

----- Demobilization -----

¶15. (SBU) Over 32,000 former paramilitaries have demobilized since 2002, and a further 11,000 have deserted from all illegal armed groups (about half from the FARC). FARC desertions increased significantly in 2007. The GOC has developed a reintegration program to meet the demobilized needs -- the largest such reintegration program ever attempted. A small percentage of renegade paramilitaries have joined new criminal groups, largely dedicated to drug trafficking, racketeering, and other crimes.

¶16. (SBU) The Justice and Peace Law process for the ex-paramilitaries -- which provides reduced 5-8 year sentences for paramilitaries guilty of human rights abuses in exchange for truth and reparations -- is exposing the full extent of paramilitary penetration of Colombian society and politics. It has helped solve over 200 murders and led to the exhumation of over 800 bodies of paramilitary victims.

----- Peace Process -----

¶17. (SBU) The military and the FARC have decimated the National Liberation Army (ELN), causing many of its fronts to increase narcotrafficking activities. The GOC and ELN spent two years negotiating in Cuba without success. Talks stalled largely because the ELN overestimates its leverage, insisting on substantive political reforms unacceptable to the GOC. The GOC-ELN talks recently moved to Venezuela, and the GOC agreed to have President Chavez facilitate the talks.

¶18. (SBU) The FARC has refused to engage in meaningful peace talks, and killed eleven state legislators it had held hostage for five years. President Uribe accepted an offer by Chavez to act as an intermediary to facilitate a possible "humanitarian exchange" of 45 "political" hostages held by the FARC for FARC prisoners in Colombian jails. Still, Uribe said he would not accept the FARC's demand for a demilitarized zone as a prerequisite for talks, nor would he allow freed FARC prisoners to return to the FARC's ranks. Chavez and a FARC official have tentatively scheduled a meeting in Venezuela on October 8. Another intermediary, Senator Piedad Cordoba, is seeking a meeting in the United States with FARC members "Simon Trinidad" and "Sonia" (convicted in the United States of terrorism and drug charges, respectively). The USG is considering the request.

----- U.S. Hostages -----

¶19. (SBU) The three U.S. contractors captured by the FARC in February 2003 remain the longest held U.S. hostages in the world. Their safe release remains a top U.S. priority, and we continually revise our diplomatic and military options for freeing the hostages. The GOC continues to provide full assistance, and President Uribe has assured us the U.S. hostages will be included in any humanitarian exchange. Brownfield